



BILLING CODE 6717-01-P  
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Northern Natural Gas Company

Docket No. PF18-1-000

NOTICE OF INTENT TO PREPARE AN  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE PLANNED  
**NORTHERN LIGHTS 2019 EXPANSION PROJECT**  
AND REQUEST FOR COMMENTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The staff of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC or Commission) will prepare an environmental assessment (EA) that will discuss the environmental impacts of the Northern Lights 2019 Expansion Project involving construction and operation of facilities by Northern Natural Gas Company (Northern) in Olmsted, Freeborn, Mower, Morrison, Carver, Hennepin, Wright, Le Sueur, Rice, and Steele Counties, Minnesota. The Commission will use this EA in its decision-making process to determine whether the project is in the public convenience and necessity.

This notice announces the opening of the scoping process the Commission will use to gather input from the public and interested agencies on the project. You can make a difference by providing us with your specific comments or concerns about the project. Your comments should focus on the potential environmental effects, reasonable alternatives, and measures to avoid or lessen environmental impacts. Your input will help the Commission staff determine what issues they need to evaluate in the EA. To ensure that your comments are timely and properly recorded, please send your comments so that the Commission receives them in Washington, DC **on or before March 8, 2018**.

If you sent comments on this project to the Commission **before** the opening of this docket on October 10, 2017, you will need to file those comments in Docket No. PF18-1-000 to ensure they are considered as part of this proceeding.

This notice is being sent to the Commission's current environmental mailing list for this project. State and local government representatives should notify their constituents of this planned project and encourage them to comment on their areas of concern.

If you are a landowner receiving this notice, a pipeline company representative may contact you about the acquisition of an easement to construct, operate, and maintain the planned facilities. The company would seek to negotiate a mutually acceptable

agreement. However, if the Commission approves the project, that approval conveys with it the right of eminent domain. Therefore, if easement negotiations fail to produce an agreement, the pipeline company could initiate condemnation proceedings where compensation would be determined in accordance with state law.

A fact sheet prepared by the FERC entitled “An Interstate Natural Gas Facility On My Land? What Do I Need To Know?” is available for viewing on the FERC website ([www.ferc.gov](http://www.ferc.gov)). This fact sheet addresses a number of typically asked questions, including the use of eminent domain and how to participate in the Commission’s proceedings.

### **Public Participation**

For your convenience, there are three methods you can use to submit your comments to the Commission. The Commission encourages electronic filing of comments and has expert staff available to assist you at (202) 502-8258 or [FercOnlineSupport@ferc.gov](mailto:FercOnlineSupport@ferc.gov). Please carefully follow these instructions so that your comments are properly recorded.

- 1) You can file your comments electronically using the [eComment](#) feature on the Commission’s website ([www.ferc.gov](http://www.ferc.gov)) under the link to [Documents and Filings](#). This is an easy method for submitting brief, text-only comments on a project;
- 2) You can file your comments electronically by using the [eFiling](#) feature on the Commission’s website ([www.ferc.gov](http://www.ferc.gov)) under the link to [Documents and Filings](#). With eFiling, you can provide comments in a variety of formats by attaching them as a file with your submission. New eFiling users must first create an account by clicking on [eRegister](#). If you are filing a comment on a particular project, please select “Comment on a Filing” as the filing type; or
- 3) You can file a paper copy of your comments by mailing them to the following address. Be sure to reference the project docket number (PF18-1-000) with your submission:

Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary  
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission  
888 First Street NE, Room 1A  
Washington, DC 20426

## **Summary of the Planned Project**

The Northern Lights 2019 Expansion Project includes two components in Minnesota— the Rochester Expansion and the Northern Lights 2019 Expansion. For the Rochester Expansion component, Northern plans to:

- construct 12.3 miles of 16-inch-diameter pipeline, referred to as the Rochester greenfield lateral;
- increase the maximum allowable operating pressure (MAOP) of 8 miles of the La Crosse branch line;
- relocate the La Crosse MAOP control valve assembly; and
- construct the Rochester Town Border Station.

For the Northern Lights 2019 Expansion component, Northern plans to construct:

- 4.2 miles of 8-inch-diameter pipeline extending the existing Alexandria branch line;
- 3.1 miles of 24-inch-diameter looping<sup>1</sup> of the existing Wilmar D branch line;
- 9.9 miles of 24-inch-diameter pipeline, referred to as the Rockford to Buffalo greenfield lateral;
- 1.6 miles of 16-inch-diameter looping of the existing New Prague branch line;
- a 15,900-horsepower Solar Mars turbine compressor unit at the existing Faribault Compressor Station;
- a 15,900-horsepower Solar Mars turbine compressor unit and appurtenant facilities at the existing Owatonna Compressor Station; and
- a new 11,153-horsepower compressor station near Carver, Minnesota.

The Rochester Expansion component of the project would provide 37,093 dekatherms per day of incremental capacity to meet the future growth needs in the area of Rochester, Minnesota. The Northern Lights 2019 Expansion component would help Northern meet the incremental natural gas needs of Minnesota. According to Northern, its project is designed to optimize the placement of facilities to meet customer needs.

The general location of the project facilities is shown in appendix 1.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A pipeline loop is a segment of pipe constructed parallel to an existing pipeline to increase capacity.

<sup>2</sup> The appendices referenced in this notice will not appear in the Federal Register. Copies of the appendices were sent to all those receiving this notice in the mail and are

## **Land Requirements for Construction**

Construction of the planned facilities would disturb about 627 acres of land for the aboveground facilities and the pipeline. Following construction, Northern would maintain about 204 acres for permanent operation of the project's facilities; the remaining acreage would be restored and revert to former uses. About 38 percent of the planned pipeline route parallels existing pipeline, utility, or road rights-of-way.

## **The EA Process**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires the Commission to take into account the environmental impacts that could result from an action whenever it considers the issuance of a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity. NEPA also requires us<sup>3</sup> to discover and address concerns the public may have about proposals. This process is referred to as scoping. The main goal of the scoping process is to focus the analysis in the EA on the important environmental issues. By this notice, the Commission requests public comments on the scope of the issues to address in the EA. We will consider all filed comments during the preparation of the EA.

In the EA we will discuss impacts that could occur as a result of the construction and operation of the planned project under these general headings:

- geology and soils;
- land use;
- water resources, fisheries, and wetlands;
- cultural resources;
- vegetation and wildlife;
- air quality and noise;
- endangered and threatened species;
- socioeconomics;
- public safety; and
- cumulative impacts.

We will also evaluate possible alternatives to the planned project or portions of the project, and make recommendations on how to lessen or avoid impacts on the various resource areas.

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available at [www.ferc.gov](http://www.ferc.gov) using the link called eLibrary or from the Commission's Public Reference Room, 888 First Street NE, Washington, DC 20426, or call (202) 502-8371. For instructions on connecting to eLibrary, refer to the last page of this notice.

<sup>3</sup> We, us, and our refer to the environmental staff of the Commission's Office of Energy Projects.

Although no formal application has been filed, we have already initiated our NEPA review under the Commission's pre-filing process. The purpose of the pre-filing process is to encourage early involvement of interested stakeholders and to identify and resolve issues before the FERC receives an application. As part of our pre-filing review, we have begun to contact some federal and state agencies to discuss their involvement in the scoping process and the preparation of the EA.

The EA will present our independent analysis of the issues. The EA will be available in the public record through eLibrary. Depending on the comments received during the scoping process, we may also publish and distribute the EA to the public for an allotted comment period. We will consider all comments on the EA before we make our recommendations to the Commission. To ensure we have the opportunity to consider and address your comments, please carefully follow the instructions in the Public Participation section, beginning on page 2.

With this notice, we are asking agencies with jurisdiction by law and/or special expertise with respect to the environmental issues related to this project to formally cooperate with us in the preparation of the EA.<sup>4</sup> Agencies that would like to request cooperating agency status should follow the instructions for filing comments provided under the Public Participation section of this notice.

### **Consultations Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act**

In accordance with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's implementing regulations for section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, we are using this notice to initiate consultation with the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and to solicit their views and those of other government agencies, interested Indian tribes, and the public on the project's potential effects on historic properties.<sup>5</sup> We will define the project-specific Area of Potential Effects (APE) in consultation with the SHPO as the project develops. On natural gas facility projects, the APE at a minimum encompasses all areas subject to ground disturbance (examples include construction right-of-way, contractor/pipe storage yards, compressor stations, and access roads). Our EA for this project will document our findings on the impacts on historic properties and summarize the status of consultations under section 106.

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<sup>4</sup> The Council on Environmental Quality regulations addressing cooperating agency responsibilities are at Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1501.6.

<sup>5</sup> The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation regulations are at Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 800. Those regulations define historic properties as any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

## **Currently Identified Environmental Issues**

We have already identified several issues that we think deserve attention based on a preliminary review of the planned facilities and the environmental information provided by Northern. This preliminary list of issues may change based on your comments and our analysis.

- Impact on landowners from noise and dust during construction of the pipelines.
- Compatibility of pipelines with existing and future land uses, including zoning restrictions on adjacent properties.

## **Environmental Mailing List**

The environmental mailing list includes federal, state, and local government representatives and agencies; elected officials; environmental and public interest groups; Native American Tribes; other interested parties; and local libraries and newspapers. This list also includes all affected landowners (as defined in the Commission's regulations) who are potential right-of-way grantors, whose property may be used temporarily for project purposes, or who own homes within certain distances of aboveground facilities, and anyone who submits comments on the project. We will update the environmental mailing list as the analysis proceeds to ensure that we send the information related to this environmental review to all individuals, organizations, and government entities interested in and/or potentially affected by the planned project.

If we publish and distribute the EA, copies will be sent to the environmental mailing list for public review and comment. **If you would prefer to receive a paper copy of the document instead of the CD version or would like to remove your name from the mailing list, please return the attached Information Request (appendix 2).**

## **Becoming an Intervenor**

Once Northern files its application with the Commission, you may want to become an intervenor which is an official party to the Commission's proceeding. Intervenor play a more formal role in the process and are able to file briefs, appear at hearings, and be heard by the courts if they choose to appeal the Commission's final ruling. An intervenor formally participates in the proceeding by filing a request to intervene. Motions to intervene are more fully described at <http://www.ferc.gov/resources/guides/how-to/intervene.asp>. Instructions for becoming an intervenor are in the Document-less Intervention Guide under the e-filing link on the Commission's website. Please note that the Commission will not accept requests for intervenor status at this time. You must wait until the Commission receives a formal application for the project.

### **Additional Information**

Additional information about the project is available from the Commission's Office of External Affairs, at **(866) 208-FERC**, or on the FERC website ([www.ferc.gov](http://www.ferc.gov)) using the eLibrary link. Click on the eLibrary link, click on General Search and enter the docket number, excluding the last three digits in the Docket Number field (i.e., PF18-1). Be sure you have selected an appropriate date range. For assistance, please contact FERC Online Support at [FercOnlineSupport@ferc.gov](mailto:FercOnlineSupport@ferc.gov) or toll free at (866) 208-3676, or for TTY, contact (202) 502-8659. The eLibrary link also provides access to the texts of formal documents issued by the Commission, such as orders, notices, and rulemakings.

In addition, the Commission offers a free service called eSubscription which allows you to keep track of all formal issuances and submittals in specific dockets. This can reduce the amount of time you spend researching proceedings by automatically providing you with notification of these filings, document summaries, and direct links to the documents. Go to [www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/esubscription.asp](http://www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/esubscription.asp).

Finally, public sessions or site visits will be posted on the Commission's calendar located at [www.ferc.gov/EventCalendar/EventsList.aspx](http://www.ferc.gov/EventCalendar/EventsList.aspx) along with other related information.

DATED: February 6, 2018

Kimberly D. Bose,  
Secretary.

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